For every £1 spent on union supported learning and training, the economy gets £9.15 back, according to a new study we’ve published this month.

The report, based on findings from the University of Exeter, shows that £5.75 of this £9.15 economic return comes from the boost union-led training gives to workers’ wages and employment prospects over their lifetimes.

However, the study also reveals that for every £1 spent on union-led training and learning, employers see a return of £3.40 thanks to staff becoming more skilled and productive.

The government provided £14million funding between 2012 and 2015 for the Union Learning Fund, which was used to support 350,000 workers into training and education. Researchers estimate that the total benefit to the economy triggered by this investment will amount to more than £900million.

The report also surveyed over 2,500 learners who took part in the training. It found:

• Over half (56%) had gained a qualification as a result of their engagement in union-led learning and training.

• Nearly three-quarters (74%) felt that union-led learning and training had given them new skills that they might use in their current job.

• Two-thirds (60%) felt they had gained new skills they could use to get a new job or pursue a different type of career.

As well as helping workers to get better terms and conditions, each year more than 230,000 people get training and learning opportunities through their union. Union learning is mainstream, with 26 unions taking part and union learning centres in workplaces as diverse as Reading FC (Professional Footballers’ Association), Boots in Nottingham (USDAW) and HMP Dartmoor (Prison Officers’ Association).

This study highlights the huge benefits union learning brings to workplaces and the UK economy – and yet many people don’t know that day-in day-out union reps are quietly busy getting workers into learning.

As well as boosting productivity, union-led training gives people the skills and confidence needed to transform their working lives and progress in their careers.

Union learning is a great way to make sure everyone has the skills they need – and it’s a huge win for employers and the economy too.

Beth Farhat

Regional Secretary Northern TUC